

In re Patent Application of:
TORRES ET AL.
Serial No. 09/774,393
Filed: **JANUARY 31, 2001**

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In the Specification:

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 16, line 9, as follows:

As illustrated in Fig.7, the distributing means **39** can include a distribution device **60** having an outer surface portion **62**. The distribution device can advantageously be positioned in a public location, e.g., a convenience store, grocery store, or public library and can also be positioned at the location of each of the plurality of physicians **50** in the network of physicians **56**. The distribution device **60** can be characterized as a vending machine as understood by those skilled in the art. The distribution device **60** includes purchasing means **64** for purchasing at least one of the plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers **20** positioned therein. The purchasing mean **64** includes a payment device **68**. The payment device **68** can include a device that recognizes currency, such as dollar bills and coins for example, and can also include a device that is responsive to credit and debit cards for payment of at least one prepaid healthcare patient identifier **20**. Once the payment device **68** accepts a predetermined payment as recognition for payment for the at least one prepaid healthcare patient identifier **20**, the distribution device **60** dispenses the at least one prepaid healthcare patient identifier **20**.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 17, line 14, as follows:

As best illustrated in Fig. 4, a second embodiment of the present invention provides a prepaid healthcare service system **10'** including a server **80'** having a database **82'**

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including data related to a plurality of patients **40** and a plurality of physicians **50** in a network of physicians **56**. The prepaid healthcare service system **10'** also advantageously includes a communications network **84'** positioned to be in communication with the server **80'**. The prepaid healthcare service system further includes a plurality of computers **86'** positioned to be in communication with the communications network **84'** including a user interface responsive to a user **U**. The system still further includes purchasing means **64'** for purchasing a plurality of prepaid healthcare consultations with the plurality of physicians **50** in the network of physicians **56** and prepaid healthcare updating means **32'** for updating information regarding each of the plurality of patients **40**. Both the updating means **32'** and the purchasing means **64'** are positioned on the server **80'**.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 18, line 29, as follows:

The purchasing means **64** positioned on the server **80'** can advantageously include a purchaser **67'**. A patient **40** or user **U** that accesses the server **80'** through one of the plurality of computers **86'** positioned to be in communication with the communications network **84'**, can advantageously purchase a plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers **20'** using the purchaser **64' 67'**. Each of the plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers **20'** includes a preselected number of prepaid healthcare consultations associated therewith. Each one of the prepaid healthcare patient identifiers **20'** can include a card **22'** having a flexible body. Each of the plurality of cards **22'** includes patient identification means **23'** positioned on a surface of

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the flexible body of the card **22'** that can advantageously be used to identify each of the plurality of patients **40** participating in the prepaid healthcare service system **10'**. Each of the plurality of cards **22'** also includes medical network identification means **37'** positioned on the flexible body for identifying the network of physicians **56** providing the plurality of prepaid healthcare consultations to the plurality of patients **40**. The patient identification means **23'** positioned on each of the plurality of patient identification cards **22'** advantageously makes each of the plurality of cards **22'** unique to each of the plurality of patients **40**. Further the patient identification means **23'** advantageously simplifies the process for each of the physicians **50** in the network of physicians **56** to identify each of the plurality of patients **40** as being members in the prepaid healthcare service system **10'**.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 20, line 18, as follows:

The prepaid healthcare service system further includes recharging means **90'** positioned on the server **80'** and responsive to each of the plurality of patients **40** and each of the plurality of physicians **50** in the network of physicians **56**. The recharging means **90'** includes a recharger **91'**, as perhaps best illustrated in Fig. 4, for purchasing additional prepaid healthcare consultations. When each of the plurality of patients **40** are informed that the remaining number of prepaid healthcare consultations is equal to or less than the predetermined number, the recharger **91'** advantageously allows each of the plurality of patients **40** an avenue to recharge or replenish the amount of prepaid healthcare consultations

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associated with the patient identifier 20' without the need to purchase a new patient identifier 20'. This also advantageously reduces the waste associated with providing additional patient identifiers 20' every time the patients 40 purchase additional prepaid healthcare consultations. The recharger 91' can also advantageously be configured to automatically replenish the number of prepaid healthcare consultations when the remaining number of prepaid healthcare consultations is equal to or less than the predetermined number. This advantageously eliminates some of the burden on the patient to purchase additional prepaid healthcare consultations.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 21, line 24, as follows:

The prepaid healthcare service system can also advantageously include a plurality of telephones 35' positioned to be in communication with the communications network 34'. Each of the plurality of patients 40 can use a predetermined combination of numbers 36' on each of the plurality of telephones 35' to access the database 82' on the server 80' to thereby perform various functions, such as activate patient identifiers 20', recharge prepaid healthcare consultations, update patient information, or any other number of functions 150. This advantageously allows patients 40 and physicians 50 that may not have access to a computer 86' to still participate in the prepaid healthcare service system 10' regardless of whether or not access to a computer 86' is available. For example, one may use a cellular telephone, or any other type of wireless communicator, to communicate with

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the server 80' and thereby perform any number of a variety of functions of the prepaid healthcare service system 10'.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 22, line 10, as follows:

As illustrated in Fig. 9, the present invention also advantageously includes methods of providing 95 a prepaid healthcare service system 10. The method includes the step of purchasing 100 a prepaid healthcare patient identifier 20. The method also includes the step of distributing 105 a plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers 20 having a preselected number of prepaid healthcare consultations associated therewith to a plurality of patients 40. The prepaid healthcare consultations take place between one of a plurality of physicians 50 in a network of physicians 56 and one of the plurality of patients 40. After the patient 40 purchases and receives the patient identifier 20, the patient activates 115 the patient identifier 20. The step of activating 115 the patient identifier 20 requires a verification process to determine if each of the plurality of patient identifiers 20 are valid. After the step of activating 115 the patient identifier 20 is completed, the patient 40 determines whether healthcare services are necessary 117. If the patient 40 determines that healthcare services are necessary 117, the patient 40 proceeds to the step of identifying 110 at least one of the plurality of physicians 50 in the network of physicians 56 to provide at least one of the plurality of prepaid healthcare consultations to one of the plurality of patients 40. After the patient 40 identifies the physician 50 in the network of physicians 56,

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the patient visits **118** the physician **50**, and presents **120** the patient identifier **20** to thereby obtain a healthcare consultation **140**. The method of distributing patient identifiers to each of the plurality of patients **40** advantageously allows each of the plurality of physicians **50** in the network of physicians **56** to identify each of the plurality of patients **40** as members in the prepaid healthcare service system **10**.

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 29, line 26, as follows:

The method of providing the plurality of prepaid healthcare consultations still further includes the step of recharging **135** at least one of the plurality of prepaid healthcare patient identifiers **20'** by purchasing additional prepaid healthcare consultations. The step of recharging **115** advantageously allows each of the plurality of patients **40** to purchase additional prepaid healthcare consultations independently of a sales person or a healthcare representative. This also advantageously provides each of the plurality of patients **40** the freedom to purchase as many or as few prepaid healthcare consultations as desired. The method further advantageously allows each of the plurality of patients the opportunity to purchase additional prepaid healthcare consultations when necessary, regardless of the present number of prepaid healthcare consultations remaining. For example, if the patient only gets paid once a month and, as a precaution, desires to purchase the prepaid healthcare consultations, regardless of the present need, the patient is free to do so by accessing the recharger **91'** positioned on the server **80'** and purchasing additional prepaid healthcare

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consultations. Each of the plurality of patients **40** and each of the plurality of physicians **50** can also advantageously access 150 the recharger **91'** positioned on the server using a telephone **35'** that is positioned in communication with the communications network **84'**. This advantageously eliminates the need for a computer **86'**. The technology available in wireless communication, i.e., cellular telephones, provide each of the plurality of patients **40** and each of the plurality of physicians **50** in the network of physicians **56** access to the recharger **91'** wherever telephone service or wireless communication service is available 150.